

Jesus at the Centre

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 September 2024

Preacher: Jonathan de Groot

[0 : 0 0] Okay, well, I did say earlier that today we are beginning a new sermon series and we're going to consider the vision that we have here at Christ Church Glasgow. And essentially what we want! to be at Christ Church Glasgow is a Christ-centered church where Jesus Christ is the center of everything that we do. And that's why our vision is loving God, loving each other and loving Glasgow. And so what we're going to do this term up until Christmas is to consider our vision by studying the book of Psalms.

And it might seem a strange place to go to think about the vision of the church by going back to the book of Psalms. I mean, aren't there better places that you might look like, say, the New Testament? Well, of course we could go there, but the message of the book of Psalms actually centers on Jesus Christ. The whole Bible is about Jesus and the Psalms point out that he is the Christ. He is the Messiah. And so what we're going to do over these next months is to take a Christ-centered approach to studying the Psalms, which is really how we should be reading them and how we should be singing the Psalms anyway. In other words, we understand the Psalms best when we see them as the songs of Jesus, because they're ultimately all about him. And this is what Jesus himself said. So after his resurrection, he said in Luke chapter 24, everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, the prophets, and the Psalms. So all of the Old Testament, including the Psalms, looks forward to Christ. And so the Psalms are filled with Christ, which makes them actually God's words to us more than our words to God. And so we don't have to bolt Jesus on at the end of the Psalms as we study them. We don't have to shoehorn him in somehow or somewhere, but we should read the Psalms Christologically. It's a word that theologians would use Christologically, meaning focused on Christ. And this way of reading the Psalms was understood by the free church minister, Andrew Bonner. And he wrote in the 19th century in his book, Christ and his church in the book of Psalms. He said this, the writers were prepared by God through personal and public circumstances for breathing forth appropriately the mind of him, meaning Christ, the mind of him who used them. So he's saying that the Psalms are all about Christ.

And so as we look at the Psalms, we're going to look at every Psalm. There is 150 of them. So if we took one a week, then it would be three years. So we're not going to do that, but we're going to begin today looking at Psalm one this week, Psalm two next week, and then look at selected Psalms as we think about what it means to be loving God and loving each other and loving Glasgow. Now Psalm one this week, Psalm two next week, both Psalms center on Christ. And it's worth noting the connection between Psalm one and Psalm two. So if you've got them open in front of you, it'll be helpful because these Psalms together, one and two, are basically the gateway or the doorway into the whole of the Psalter. They're introducing us to the purpose and also the message of the book of Psalms. So Psalm one tells us of the righteous man who, Psalm two tells us is the divine king. And we'll think more about that.

But Jesus Christ is of course, the one who fits this description, the righteous man and the divine king. And so we're going to look at two simple points this afternoon. They're up on the screen. Their first point is the way. And then the second point is the one, the way and the one. So notice there verse one, it says the way stand in the way of sinners. And then again, verse six, it describes the way twice.

[4 : 1 1] And so these two references to the way in a sense, bookend or bracket the whole Psalm. And so Psalm one is essentially challenging us to consider which way we will go in life. What way will you go? And Psalm one shows us the best way, the way that is rooted in God's word, God's instruction. But the Psalm contrasts two different ways to us where the way of the righteous differs from the way of the wicked. And it forces us to ask which way are we going to walk in. That's what it

says basically in verse one and two, which way are we going to walk in? Then secondly, it pictures what each way looks like in verse three and four. And then finally, in verse five and six, it describes how each way ends. So let's think about which way and then what do they look like? And then how do they end? So first of all, which way?

Okay, first one and two, blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord and who meditates on his law day and night. Now the Psalm begins by saying blessed or blessed is the man.

Our translation says the one, but in the original it says the man. Now it can include any human being, male or female, but it's actually masculine singular. So it can also refer to one specific man. Now who might that one specific man be right at the very beginning first line of the book of Psalms? Well, this man is a righteous man and he fulfills the picture that Psalm 1 paints for us. Who is he? Well, we'll come back to this because it's the key in helping us understand the Psalm. Now this word blessed means more than just being happy or more than just happy. It's stronger because to be blessed is to know God's special favour. And so how do you receive this divine favour? Well, Psalm 1 answers partly for us, but it's what the entire Psalter wants to show us. In fact, it's what the whole Bible wants to tell us. How we receive this divine favour from God. Because this blessing, this favour, ultimately comes from God's chosen King. Who is he? Well, he's right here, explicitly at the end of Psalm 2, which we'll look at next week. So Psalm 2 verse 12 says, blessed are all who take refuge in him.

[7 : 06] Who's the him? The Psalm is pointing us to the Christ. Ultimately, this Psalm is fulfilled in Jesus. So both these Psalms, Psalm 1, Psalm 2 point us as we'll see ultimately to Jesus Christ.

So first we need to see the contrast before we get to Jesus between the righteous man and the wicked. The righteous one you notice there in verse 1 is described by what he avoids. So he does not walk instead with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers.

Now the commentators point out this downward progression of wickedness here. And so the verbs, you notice, go from walking to standing to sitting. And then the nouns go from counsel to way to seat.

And it's all indicating to us a hardening in sin. So it goes from sinful advice on to sinful behaviour and then to sinful habits. So like casual identification, walking in step with, to confident affiliation, stand in the way that others are standing in, to complete association, sit in the company of. It's a downward descent into wickedness and sin and evil. So that is one way to live your life. That's what the Psalm is saying to us. But there's another way to go, a better way to go. And so we read there verse 2, the blessed or the righteous one takes this way because whose delight we read is in the law of the Lord and who meditates on his law day and night. Notice that the law is mentioned twice. It's the word Torah meaning instruction. So it refers to the instruction in the Old Testament, but ultimately refers to the whole of God's word. God's law is his instruction for living his way, for living the life he wants us to live as people. And so the righteous one delights in and meditates on it day and night, knowing the value, knowing the importance of God's instruction, where the blessed one basically has God's word as the background music to his life. It's playing all the time, day and night. Because meditate here doesn't mean just sitting on a sofa in silence, which is I guess what people mean when they talk about meditating today. That means sitting there in quiet solitude. It means trying to empty your mind of all thoughts.

[9 : 50] But the word meditate here means to mutter. So it does refer to speaking, which is not being silent, and it's not emptying your mind of everything, but it's speaking God's words over and over and over again, meditating on them so that they fill your mind and then begin to delight your heart and then shape your life in this world. Because if our thinking you see is not shaped by God's word, then it will be shaped by this world. It will be shaped by the way that sinners take. And so it's worth stopping to ask yourself, well, which way am I going? What are the biggest influences in your life? What company do you keep?

What voices are you listening to? What is it that you delight in most? What do you spend your time meditating on? Because the answers to these questions will orientate you and will direct the way that you go in life. So are we listening to God's good, wise, and loving instruction for our lives? Or are we consuming what the culture spews out through social media? I suspect we do a lot better by spending more time meditating on God's word and less time scrolling through all the many screens

that we've got.

We probably make plenty time to study your screens day and night, first thing in the morning. What do you do when you wake up? You reach for your phone and you look at the latest social media or newsfeed. What do you do before you switch off your lights or even in the dark you scroll through your phone? And yet we still seem to struggle, don't we, to find time to study the Bible at any point during the day or night? But can you see that whatever we meditate on most will influence our thinking and it will shape our living and ultimately will direct the way that we go in life? And the psalm is describing two separate contrasting ways.

And so the reality is that if we don't delight in what God has to say to us then we will be deceived by what the world wants to say to us. And that's illustrated perfectly in the next lines of this psalm in verse 3 and 4. So let's move on from which way to what do these two different ways look like?

Verse 3, that person is like a tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither whatever they do prospers. So there's a contrast here between the righteous one and the wicked and it's drawn out further through these agricultural pictures which you'll understand if you're a chukter or a farmer because first of all there's this picture of a tree that is planted by streams of water and so the image here is of a tree that is next to irrigation channels where there's just a constant supply of fresh water that continually nourishes the tree so the tree is obviously strong and stable and fruitful. And that illustrates the life of the one who is rooted in God's word, God's instruction,

God's law, there's strength, there is stability, there is fruitfulness in that life. But then secondly the psalm pictures the opposite in verse 4, not so the wicked they're like chaff that the wind blows away. Now that's a stark contrast isn't it from being rooted to being rootless because the psalmist is saying the wicked are like chaff so they're compared to dead rootless plants easily blown away in the wind.

[13 : 53] And this is illustrating for us the life of the one who rejects God's instruction. There's no substance to them, there's no strength, there's no stability, there's no good fruit. So that's what they look like.

Which way? What do they look like? And then thirdly under our first point how do they end? And that's what we see in verse 5 and 6. So therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous for the Lord watches over the way of the righteous but the way of the wicked leads to destruction. So it doesn't end well for the wicked. So while in this life the wicked may stand arrogantly in the way of sinners but the psalmist is saying they will not stand in the judgment. Which is all that really matters at the end of the day isn't it? That's what we should be asking. Where does the way I take in this life right now ultimately lead me? Never mind what the way offers to me but where will I end up? Because the psalm is alerting us to God's coming judgment where he will watch over the righteous but the way of the wicked will perish. And so the wicked will sit in the company of mockers in this life in judgment of God and his way and his word but we're told they will be standing in the dock before God at the judgment and it will lead to destruction. That's the wicked. But we're also introduced to the assembly of the righteous. Well who are they? For the original readers the assembly of the righteous are the people of God. Those who have been declared righteous by faith because they believed

God's promises just as it says of Abraham in Genesis 15. And those promises that were given are all fulfilled in Jesus Christ. And so for us now that Christ has come we read this as believers who are still declared righteous by faith. Faith in Christ. And so we become as the church the assembly of the righteous.

And so the righteous whether back then or now are those who have entered into a relationship with God by faith and who seek to live out that faith by following the way of righteousness. You see the psalm shows us that the two ways come to two very different ends don't they? The way of the righteous and the way of the wicked.

And they're contrasted throughout the psalm but the stark difference is emphasized in the very first word of the psalm and in the very last word of the psalm. There's the word blessed and then the last word destruction or more accurately perish. Because these two ways don't just differ in life but they differ for all eternity. Where the difference turns on or spins on an individual's response to God's word and therefore to God's king whom psalm 2 is telling us all about. And so as we read the psalm in the light of the coming, of the life, of the death, and of the resurrection of Jesus, the two ways or the two ends are determined by a person's relationship with Jesus. And so when the final verse

says the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, watches over essentially means knows. It's a deeply intimate personal relational word saying the Lord knows those who are his. He knows the righteous. Those who are only righteous through a relationship with a righteous one, Jesus Christ. And so that's the way the psalm is laying out for us.

[17 : 46] But secondly, let's think of the one. Remember we said we come back to the one who is described in verse one. Because the blessed one or the blessed man lives the way the psalm describes.

And there is only one, only one who fits the description of this psalm perfectly. And you know who that one is. Only one man could possibly live up to this ideal.

The man, Jesus Christ, uniquely lived and fulfilled this psalm. Now that's not to say that the original author of the psalm had Jesus in mind and knew exactly all that Jesus would do when he wrote this. But it is to say that God is the author of scripture, which all points to Christ, is showing us how they're fulfilled in him.

Because Jesus alone can say every word of Psalm 1 with complete integrity. Now perhaps if you in your life, like I in mine, thought that yeah I can do Psalm 1, I can say those words and they apply to me and I can do it.

[19 : 01] Well, no I can't and no you can't. There is only one who can and that's Jesus Christ.

Because think about it, Jesus is the blessed man who did not walk with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers. Not ever did Jesus do any of those things.

And Jesus is the blessed man who delighted 100% in the law of the Lord. He meditated on it day and night.

He obeyed it perfectly. Nobody else ever has. Jesus is therefore the blessed man who was like that tree planted by streams of water.

For everything he did prospered. Has everything you've done prospered? Even for one day? I don't think so. Jesus is the one who finished the work that God the Father gave him to do.

And so as we read this Psalm, we're not speculating when we say the Lord Jesus sung this Psalm himself. And as he sang it, he sang it fully aware that he alone is the truly righteous and blessed man the Psalm speaks of.

[20 : 16] And yet Jesus willingly gave all that up. Jesus, despite being blessed and righteous, took our sin.

He became our wickedness when he died on the cross. He suffered and died and bore the judgment of God in our place. And because of his completed work, God exalted him to the highest place.

And so as the king and as the head of the church, Jesus is the leader of the assembly of the righteous, of all those who have been declared righteous through faith in him.

What does that mean? Well, it means that we now inherit all of the blessing that Jesus has won for us. So the blessed man gives us his blessing.

It says in Ephesians chapter 1 verse 3, Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

[21 : 20] And so through the ultimate blessed one in Psalm 1, every spiritual blessing becomes ours. And so when we are righteous in Christ, then the Lord watches over our way now and forevermore.

And so can you see how Jesus Christ perfectly exemplifies this Psalm for us? This Psalm paints a beautiful picture of Jesus.

And so we misunderstand it if we think that it's saying the way to earn God's blessing or the way to achieve righteousness is by reading the Bible all the time, day and night, never stopping.

That's a desperately depressing message, isn't it? Because none of us can possibly do it. And it means we then turn the Psalm into impossible law rather than gracious gospel.

But as we read Psalm 1 in a Christ-centered way, it stops us from some kind of superficial righteousness. Believing that we can become righteous or good enough through our own efforts, our own accomplishments, our own good works.

[22 : 36] We can't. We fail every single time. Which means someone stops us looking down on other people and saying, well, those people over there, they're the wicked ones.

They're the sinners. But me, I'm in a different kind of category that is above all of those. One of the fact is we are all sinners. We all need to be forgiven.

And that's why Jesus came. We need our sin to be washed away and we need to be clothed with his righteousness. That's why the New Testament tells us, 1 Corinthians chapter 1, that Christ Jesus has become for us wisdom from God.

That is our righteousness, holiness, and redemption. And so when Jesus Christ is our righteousness, our righteousness, he has given it to us, that our hearts become full of gratitude. That then we want to do what Psalm 1 tells us to do. Not so we can earn our righteousness, but because that's what God has already declared us to be in Jesus.

[23 : 47] And so now we have this spirit-given desire to live a righteous life. Not in order to get into God's good books, but because he's already declared us righteous in Jesus.

And by his spirit, well, we have God's law written on our hearts, Jeremiah 31 tells us. And so we want God's word to be meditated on in our minds so it sinks into our hearts so that it changes our lives and we bear fruit in this world.

Now, I wonder if you've ever heard of Oswald Lawrence. Anyone heard of Oswald Lawrence? You've probably never heard of him, but you've probably heard his voice. Because Oswald Lawrence was the voice of the iconic Mind the Gap announcement for the London Underground. And if you've been to London, you'll have heard it. Lawrence was a theatre actor who lived in London with his wife until he died in 2007. And the announcement, Mind the Gap, dates all the way back to 1969, when London Transport wanted to tell its passengers to mind the gap. I always wonder, why did they have to tell them to mind the gap? Did a few people fall in the gap? I don't know. Anyway, Oswald passed away, but his widow took comfort from the fact that she could still hear her late husband's voice.

[25 : 15] And she heard it every day on her commute to work, and she used the embankment station in the London Underground. And that was until one day in November 2012, when she got to the platform and she was devastated to discover that her husband's voice could no longer be heard.

Because what happened was that Transport for London had digitalised the PA system, and so they got rid of Oswald Lawrence's voice, saying, Mind the Gap.

And so she inquired of staff, and she was told that the new system meant that his voice was gone. It was lost, probably forever.

But then when Transport London realised how much his voice meant to his wife, they arranged for a CD of the recording of his voice, so she could listen to his voice anytime she wanted to.

But then when the Transport for London bosses heard about it, they decided to go one better. And they restored the original Mind the Gap announcement by Oswald Lawrence at the embankment station.

[26 : 27] And it's the only station where you hear the voice of Oswald Lawrence, and it lives on to this present day. So if you go there, you'll hear him saying, Mind the Gap.

And his widow has said that she goes there some days, not because she's going anywhere, but just to sit on the platform, sometimes for a few minutes, sometimes for up to an hour, just to hear the voice of her beloved.

And so do you know what the Psalm is saying to us? It's saying that we should love to listen to the voice of our beloved, the voice of the Lord speaking to us.

His voice, his law, his instruction, his word should be our delight. And we can hear that voice anytime, anywhere.

And so as we take Psalm 1 to heart, we will avoid the way of the wicked, and we will walk the righteous way of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

[27 : 31] Because Jesus is the one Psalm 1 speaks of. And so singing its words will drive us back to Jesus again and again and again.

The one we need in this life and for the life to come. Let's pray.